

Message Text

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44

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 10245

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SUBJECT: ATHENS NEWSPAPER ACCUSES AMERICANS OF ASSISTING "ESCAPE
FROM GREECE" OF WIDOW OF RICHARD S. WELCH

1. AFTERNOON NEWSPAPER ATHINAIKI (LEFT OF CENTER, PRO-
PASOK/PAPANDREOU) DECEMBER 30 CARRIED AS IT S MAIN FRONT
PAGE STORY A REPORT ALLEGING THAT THE WIDOW OF SLAIN EMBASSY
OFFICER RICHARD S. WELCH WAS SPIRITED OUT OF GREECE WITH
"THE ASSISTANCE OF THE AMERICANS AND WITH THE FORBEARANCE OF
THE GREEK GOVERNMENT." ATHINAIKI CATEGORIZED THE DEPARTURE
FROM GREECE OF MRS. WELCH--"AN EYE WITNESS TO THE MURDER"--
AS A "POLITICAL SCANDAL WHICH DEMONSTRATES THE DEGREE OF
DEPENDENCE OF THE GREEK GOVERNMENT ON THE WISHES OF WASHINGTON."
STORY NOTES FURTHER THAT MRS. WELCH LEFT GREECE FOR NAPLES,
WHICH ATHINAIKI CHARACTERIZES "AS THE SEAT OF CIA ACTIVITIES
IN SOUTHERN EUROPE."

2. WHILE ATHINAIKI ASSERTS THAT IT IS NOT YET KNOWN WHETHER
THIS GESTURE OF "GOODWILL" ON PART OF GOG WAS
SPONTANEOUS OR NOT, STORY CONTINUES BY NOTING
REPORTS ARE CIRCULATING TO THE EFFECT THAT USG
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SOUGHT "RELEASE" OF MRS WELCH. IN A BOXED ITEM

ENTITLED "BANANA REPUBLIC," WHICH ABUTS THE MAIN STORY, ATHINAIKI COMMENTARY ASSERTS THAT NOT EVEN IN A "BANANA REPUBLIC" WOULD SUCH A HUMILIATION OF NATIONAL DIGNITY OCCUR. THE COMMENTARY ASKS THE QUESTION "WHO THEN GOVERNS THE COUNTRY--AND WHEN FINALLY WILL GREECE CEASE TO BE A BANANA REPUBLIC."

3. COMMENT: FORMIN BITSIOS TELEPHONED AMB. KUBISCH EARLY THIS AFTERNOON, PROBABLY AS A RESULT OF ATHINAIKI STORY, TO EXPRESS CONCERN ABOUT MRS. WELCH'S DEPARTURE BEFORE PROPER INTERROGATION HAD TAKEN PLACE. AMBASSADOR EXPRESSED ASTONISHMENT TO BITSIOS, SAYING THAT MRS. WELCH HAD COOPERATED FULLY WITH GREEK AUTHORITIES AND HAD BEEN INTERROGATED AT LENGTH. GREEK INVESTIGATIVE OFFICIALS HAD BEEN KEPT FULLY INFORMED OF HER WHEREABOUTS AND PHYSICAL CONDITION, HAD INDICATED THAT THEY HAD COMPLETED THEIR INTERROGATION OF HER, AND HAD MADE NO OTHER COMMENT CONCERNING HER DEPARTURE OTHER THAN TO EXPRESS CONCERN FOR HER HEALTH. (GREEK INVESTIGATIVE OFFICIALS INTERROGATED MRS. WELCH AT LENGTH ON DECEMBER 24 AND 26, FOLLOWING WHICH SHE SIGNED A STATEMENT, AND HAD INDICATED NO NEED TO QUESTION HER FURTHER.) AMBASSADOR ALSO EXPLAINED THAT MRS. WELCH HAD IN ANY CASE PLANNED TO RETURN TO WASHINGTON FOR HER HUSBAND'S FUNERAL EXPECTED LATER THIS WEEK AND THAT FOLLOWING CONSULTATION WITH A GREEK PHYSICIAN THE DECISION WAS REACHED THAT SHE SHOULD TRAVEL TO NAPLES DEC 27 FOR FURTHER MEDICAL EVALUATION AT THE AMERICAN ARMED FORCES HOSPITAL THERE IN CONNECTION WITH A SUSPECTED PERFORATED ULCER (ATHENS 10182). BITSIOS SAID HE HAD NOT BEEN AWARE THAT GREEK AUTHORITIES HAD HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO INTERROGATE MRS. WELCH AND INDICATED -- AT LEAST FOR THE PRESENT -- THAT HE WAS SATISFIED ABOUT THE MATTER.

4. WE ARE CONSULTING FURTHER WITH APPROPRIATE GREEK OFFICIALS ON THIS POINT AND OFFERING TO ASSIST IN MAKING MRS. WELCH AVAILABLE AGAIN LATER, IF DESIRED, DEPENDING ON CIRCUMSTANCES AND HER OWN CONDITION OF HEALTH. THEY MAY MAKE A CLARIFYING STATEMENT ABOUT THE CONFIDENTIAL

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MATTER TO THE PRESS LATER THIS EVENING. EMBASSY IS ALSO CONSIDERING ADVISABILITY OF MAKING A STATEMENT ON THIS MATTER ITSELF AT SOME APPROPRIATE POINT.

5. WE WOULD HOPE THAT MRS. WELCH WOULD NOT HAVE TO RETURN TO GREECE IN EVENT GREEK AUTHORITIES NEEDED TO CONTACT HER FURTHER, GIVEN THE CERTAIN ORDEAL IT WOULD BE FOR HER TO COME BACK TO THE SCENE OF

HER HUSBAND'S MURDER. WE WOULD HOPE THAT ANY
NECESSARY CLARIFICATIONS OR DEPOSITIONS COULD BE
MADE IN WASHINGTON OR ELSEWHERE; HOWEVER, EMBASSY
WILL ADDRESS THIS POINT FURTHER LATER IN THE LIGHT
OF DEVELOPING CIRCUMSTANCES.
KUBISCH

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